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SENSITIVE  
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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP; EEB/IPE, USTR JASON BUNTIN

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SUBJECT: GOK OFFICIAL DISCUSSES INTERNET CENSORSHIP, VOIP  
TECHNOLOGY AND IPR INTERNET ISSUES

¶1. (SBU) During a January 4 meeting with Econoff, Nasser Al-Kendari, the Director of the Telephone Monitoring Department in the Ministry of Communications (MoC), discussed internet censorship, the GoK's prohibition on Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP) technology, and IPR-related internet issues. Al-Kendari stated that his primary job is dedicated to shutting down religious and pornographic websites that violate Kuwait's customs and traditions. Al-Kendari expressed interest in U.S. technologies, assistance on IP address resolution and standardizing ISP blocking software. Al-Kendari also requested assistance with understanding how to monitor pornographic sites that use Arabic phrases and homonyms to link to western pornographic sites. He explained that he gets his information both from complaints by the public and through random monitoring of the internet. Al-Kendari stated that in addition to the monitoring and work that his office does, internet companies filter their servers for pornography and religious violations. The Ministry of Interior has the capacity to contact any internet company directly to shutdown access to a website.

¶2. (SBU) Al-Kendari stressed that his office does not conduct vendettas against bloggers and websites that criticize him and/or his work. Al-Kendari emphasized that despite being the victim of several ad hominem blogging attacks, he refuses to block these sites. He rejected allegations that his office monitors the internet on a 24-7 basis or that it monitors bloggers and denies them their freedom of expression.

¶3. (SBU) When asked about the current ban on VOIP services such as Skype, Al-Kendari stated that the MoC sees VOIP technology as a threat to its revenue. He stated that MoC is working on legalizing VOIP in Kuwait so that it benefits both the consumer and the Ministry. As an indication of how widespread VOIP use is in Kuwait, Al-Kendari related how he once tracked a VOIP line that led him to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

¶4. (SBU) With regard to Al-Kendari's office's role in dealing with IPR violations (such as illegal file sharing), he explained that he acts in response to instructions from the Ministry of Information. He explained that he receives letters from Tarek Al-Ajmi, the Assistant Undersecretary for Press and Publications in the Ministry of Information, concerning music and film website IPR violations, and that per Al-Ajmi's instructions Al-Kendari opens IPR violations cases against the websites.

¶5. (SBU) Al-Kendari stated that, despite his office's title, it no longer conducts much telephone monitoring because the internet has become the priority issue. Al-Kendari said he deferred all law enforcement issues such as investigations on Islamic fundamentalist websites and "Internet Imams" to the Ministry of Interior.

¶6. (SBU) Comment: While the Ministry blocks access to sites deemed offensive and prohibits the downloading of Skype software in Kuwait, it paradoxically does not block access to proxy server sites allowing interested (and savvy) net users a convenient commercial work-around to avoid the MoC's firewall. End Comment.

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